

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 07360 01 OF 02 111455Z
ACTION SS-25

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-----028658 111458Z /47

O R 111414Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3557
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN NY
USMISSION SINAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 7360

EXDIS

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR PINT PGOV IS EG
SUBJ: ON THE EVE OF MONDAY'S CABINET SESSION; ISRAELI PER-
SPECTIVES TOWARD PEACE SIX MONTHS AFTER THE SADAT VISIT

1. SUMMARY: SIX MONTHS HAVE PASSED SINCE SADAT'S VISIT
TO JERUSALEM. THE INITIAL FEELING OF EUPHORIA
HAS DISSIPATED, AND ISRAELIS NO LONGER BELIEVE PEACE IS AT
HAND. THEY ARGUE WHO IS TO BLAME AND WAIT PATIENTLY
FOR NEGOTIATIONS WITH EGYPT
TO GET BACK ON TRACK. MOST ISRAELIS ARE CONVINCED THAT
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 07360 01 OF 02 111455Z

SADAT'S RIGIDITY IS CURRENTLY STANDING IN THE WAY OF
PEACE, AND THEY PREFER TO WAIT FOR SADAT TO SHOW FLEXI-
BILITY BEFORE COMMITTING THEMSELVES TO THE RESOLUTION OF
THE WEST BANK ISSUE. THIS CAUTION IS ALSO THE SOURCE
OF GROWING RESENTMENT OVER U.S. PRESSURE ON ISRAEL. MORE
IMPORTANT, NO U.S. PLAN WOULD CAUSE THE GOI TO LOSE THE
NATIONS'S CONFIDENCE UNLESS SADAT WAS SEEN BY ISRAELIS TO

AGAIN BE FLEXIBLY FOLLOWING THE PATH OF PEACE. IF SADAT IS FORTHCOMING, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT ISRAELIS WOULD TAKE A FEW RISKS FOR PEACE. BUT WE ARE NOT NEAR SUCH ISRAELI WILLINGNESS AT THE MOMENT, AND WE DONT EXPECT THE GOI'S RESPONSE THIS WEEK TO OUR TWO QUESTIONS TO ALTER THE SITUATION HERE VERY MUCH. END SUMMARY

2. AS THE ISRAELI CABINET PREPARES TO CONCLUDE ITS DISCUSSION ON THE TWO U.S. QUESTIONS, SIX MONTHS HAVE PASSED SINCE PRESIDENT SADAT'S NOV 1977 VISIT TO JERUSALEM. SADAT'S BREAK WITH THE PAST AND HIS COURAGE TO REACH OUT DIRECTLY TO ISRAEL HAD A PROFOUND IMPACT HERE. MANY ISRAELIS WERE INITIALLY EUPHORIC, SENSING THAT PEACE WAS FINALLY WITHIN REACH. AFTER 30 YEARS, SADAT HAD FINALLY GIVEN ISRAEL, AT LEAST IMPLICITLY, WHAT IT HAD BEEN SEEKING: RECOGNITION OF ITS RIGHT TO STATEHOOD -- INDEED, EVEN IMPLICIT RECOGNITION OF JERUSALEM AS THE CAPITAL OF ISRAEL -- AND FACE-TO-FACE NEGOTIATIONS.

3. OVER THE PAST SIX MONTHS, HOWEVER, THIS FEELING OF EUPHORIA HAS ALL BUT DISSIPATED. LIKE AMERICANS IN DEC 1972, ISRAELIS NO LONGER BELIEVE THAT "PEACE IS AT HAND." THEIR PRIMARY CONCERN AT PRESENT IS THAT THE OPPORTUNITY FOR PEACE NOT BE LOST. THEY ARGUE ABOUT WHO -- SADAT, BEGIN OR CARTER -- SHOULD BE DOING WHAT TO KEEP THE MOMENTUM OF THE SADAT INITIATIVE FROM DYING. THUS
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PAGE 03 TEL AV 07360 01 OF 02 111455Z

FAR, HOWEVER, THESE ARGUMENTS HAVE NOT LED TO ANY CONSOLIDATION OF ISRAELI POPULAR OPINION OR TO BOLD ACTION ON THE PART OF ANY SEGMENT OF THE ISRAELI POLITICAL SPECTRUM. AMONG OTHER REASONS THIS IS BECAUSE MANY ISRAELIS, BOTH IN GOVERNMENT AND OUT IN THE STREET, ARE CONFUSED BY THE CURRENT COURSE OF EVENTS. WHILE THEY CONTINUE TO BE HOPEFUL AND DOGGEDLY OPTIMISTIC THAT THEY ARE INDEED HEADING TOWARD AN EVENTUAL SETTLEMENT WITH EGYPT, THEY ARE NOT QUITE SURE HOW OR WHEN SUCH A SETTLEMENT WILL BE REACHED. NONE OF THE FORMULAS PROPOSED THUS FAR APPEARS HEADED IN THAT DIRECTION. SO ISRAELIS CONTINUE TO WAIT IMPATIENTLY FOR SOMEONE OR SOMETHING TO PUT THE PEACE PROCESS BACK ON TRACK.

4. ALTHOUGH ISRAELIS HAD ORIGINALLY HOPED THAT KING HUSSEIN WOULD HELP SADAT IN MOVING THE PEACE PROCESS ALONG, THE PROSPECTS OF THIS OCCURRING IN THE NEAR-TERM ARE SEEN AS DIM. NONETHELESS, HUSSEIN REMAINS A MODERATE IN ISRAELI EYES AND MANY CONTINUE TO SEE THE NEED FOR A MAJOR JORDANIAN ROLE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A SOLUTION TO THE WEST BANK. THE SYRIANS ARE CONSIDERED EXTREMISTS AND OUT OF THE GAME.

5. WHO DO THE ISRAELIS BELIEVE IS AT FAULT FOR THE
CURRENT FREEZE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS? THE "PEACE NOW"
MOVEMENT GENERALLY THINKS THAT BEGIN HAS NOT DONE ALL
THAT HE COULD DO KEEP THE NEGOTIATIONS ALIVE. THE
LABOR OPPOSITION ACCUSES THE GOVERNMENT OF HANDLING THE
NEGOTIATIONS POORLY, MAINTAINING INCONSISTENT POSITIONS
AND COMMITTING SERIOUS NEGOTIATING BLUNDERS. MORE SPE-
CIFICALLY, LABOR ARGUES THAT BEGIN OFFERED TOO MUCH TOO
QUICKLY TO EGYPT IN THE SINAI WHILE BEING INSUFFICIENTLY
FORTHCOMING ON THE WEST BANK/PALESTINIAN ISSUE. SOME
ISRAELIS ALSO ATTRIBUTE THE CURRENT DEADLOCK TO
SADAT'S INABILITY TO GAIN THE ACTIVE SUPPORT AND PARTI-
CIPATION OF OTHER ARAB MODERATES, PARTICULARLY HUSSEIN,
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PAGE 04 TEL AV 07360 01 OF 02 111455Z

AND TO HIS UNWILLINGNESS TO REJECT COMPLETELY HIS ARAB
BRETHREN BY SIGNING A SEPARATE PEACE AGREEMENT WITH ISRAEL.

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 07360 02 OF 02 111512Z
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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 7360

EXDIS

BUT BY FAR THE MOST PERVASIVE OPINION EVEN AMONG SOME MODERATES, IS THAT SADAT HIMSELF CONTINUES TO BE TOO INFLEXIBLY TIED TO HIS ORIGINAL DEMANDS FOR TOTAL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND PALESTINIAN SELF-DETERMINATION. ALMOST EVERY ISRAELI WE SEE OF WHATEVER POLITICAL STRIPE IS DEEPLY CONVINCED THAT SADAT'S RIGIDITY IS CURRENTLY STANDING IN THE WAY OF PEACE. ISRAELIS SAY THAT SADAT IS MADDENINGLY INCONSISTENT. THEY CLAIM THAT HIS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE STATEMENTS TO ISRAEL, THE US, THE VARIOUS ARAB STATES, AND THE MEDIA, SHOW HIM TO BE EXPRESSING A VARIETY OF EVER-CHANGING
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 07360 02 OF 02 111512Z

POSITIONS. BUT THEY FEAR THAT THE MOST EXTREME STATEMENTS, AND SADAT'S RECENT THREATS OF WAR FEED THESE FEARS, REFLECT WHAT IN THE END WILL BE THE ULTIMATE EGYPTIAN POSITION.

6. WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO BREAK THE CURRENT DEADLOCK? MOST ISRAELIS HAVE ACCEPTED DURING THESE MONTHS, THOUGH WITH GROWING RESERVATIONS, THE SINCERITY OF SADAT'S REPEATED PACIFIC DECLARATIONS. THIS HAS LED MODERATE ELEMENTS IN THE COUNTRY AND IN THE GOVERNMENT TO BELIEVE THE CURRENT DEADLOCK BY ADOPTING A MORE FORTHCOMING ATTITUDE TOWARD THE QUESTION OF WITHDRAWAL IN THE WEST BANK. ON THE OTHER HAND, PROBABLY A MAJORITY OF ISRAELIS PREFER TO WAIT FOR SADAT TO SHOW SOME SIGN OF FLEXIBILITY IN HIS POSITION BEFORE COMMITTING THEMSELVES TO THE RESOLUTION OF THE WEST BANK ISSUE. IF SADAT IS SINCERE, THEY REASON, NO IRREPARABLE HARM CAN BE DONE BY MOVING CAUTIOUSLY TOWARD THE COMMON GOAL OF PEACE. IF HE IS NOT, AS GENERAL EITAN AND OTHERS BELIEVE, OR IF HE IS SO CONSTRAINED BY DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL ARAB POLITICAL PRESSURES THAT ONLY A HASTILY PREPARED PATCHWORK AGREEMENT CAN BE REACHED, THEN IT IS WELL TO FIND THIS OUT NOW BEFORE ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT SECURITY ASSETS HAVE BEEN SQUANDERED IN NEGOTIATIONS.

7. CURRENT ISRAELI CAUTION IN THE NEGOTIATIONS IS ALSO LINKED TO A RELUCTANCE ON THE PART OF MANY TO RELINQUISH TERRITORY IN A SITUATION SHORT OF DURABLE, EVEN GUARANTEED PEACE. MANY ISRAELIS ARE BY NO MEANS UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THE STATUS QUO. INDEED, AFTER 30 YEARS OF WAR MANY ARE HESITANT TO YIELD THE SECURITY ASSETS THEY HAVE HELD SINCE 1967 IN THE FORM

OF TERRITORIAL BUFFERS. SEEING TIME ON THEIR SIDE THESE
ELEMENTS PREFER TO ADOPT A WAIT AND SEE POLICY, HOPING THIS
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PAGE 03 TEL AV 07360 02 OF 02 111512Z

WILL FORCE SADAT TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE AND FORTHCOMING IN HIS
POSITIONS, IF NOT, THESE ISRAELIS ARGUE NOTHING IMPORTANT
HAS BEEN LOST.

8. THE BELIEF IN THE NECESSITY OF CAUTION IS ALSO THE
SOURCE OF GROWING RESENTMENT OVER "AMERICAN PRESSURE"
ON ISRAEL. TO BE SURE, MANY ISRAELIS OPPOSE THE NEGOTIA-
TING TACTICS OF THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT. THEY REFLECT THE
RELIGIOUS/IDEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF LIKUD POLICY. A
MAJORITY OF ISRAELIS ALSO OPPOSE THE AGGRESSIVE SETTLEMENT
PHILOSOPHY OF ARIEL SHARON AND GUSH EMUNIM, BUT NOT, WE
WOULD ADD, THE RIGHT OF ISRAEL TO RETAIN AT LEAST SOME EXIST-
ING SETTLEMENTS ON THE WEST BANK. IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT CON-
SIDERABLE, IF INCONCLUSIVE, DEBATE CONTINUES IN THE COUNTRY
OVER THE EFFICACY OF BEGIN'S WEST BANK/GAZA SOLUTION. HOW-
EVER, THESE BELIEFS DO NOT CONVINCE ISRAELIS THAT A
FORMAL AMERICAN PROPOSAL IS THE WAY OUT OF THE IMPASSE.
THEY BELIEVE NOW, AS THEY HAVE IN THE PAST, THAT ANY SETTLE-
MENT WHICH IS EVENTUALLY CONCLUDED MUST BE ARRIVED AT BY
THE PARTIES INVOLVED THROUGH FACE-TO-FACE NEGOTIATIONS.
ONLY THROUGH THIS PROCESS, THEY REASON, WILL THE PARTIES
DEVELOP THE MUTUAL CONFIDENCE AND TRUST WHICH IS NECESSARY
TO THE SUCCESS OF ANY FINAL AGREEMENT. AN AMERICAN PLAN
WOULD ONLY GET IN THE WAY. MOREOVER, MANY MODERATE ISRAELIS
BELIEVE THAT DIRECT U.S. INTERVENTION WOULD SLOW THE INTER-
NAL FERMENT NECESSARY TO PRODUCE A NEW CONSENSUS OF FLEXI-
BILITY ON THE TERRITORIES. AFTER THIRTY YEARS OF WAR, IS-
RAELIS PRIDE THEMSELVES ON THEIR WILLINGNESS TO WAIT THE
EXTRA TIME THEY BELIEVE NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE A STRONG
AND LASTING FINAL ACCORD. THUS, THEY SEE CURRENT AMERICAN
POLICY AS PRECIPITOUS AND INSENSITIVE TO ISRAELI
SECURITY CONCERNS.

9. ON THIS QUESTION OF AMERICAN PRESSURE, SIGNIFI-
CANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LIKUD AND LABOR DO NOT EXIST.
THUS, WHILE LABOR PRAGMATISTS, SUCH AS YITZHAK RABIN AND
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PAGE 04 TEL AV 07360 02 OF 02 111512Z

SHIMON PERES, ATTACK THE LIKUD GOVERNMENTS HANDLING OF
THE NEGOTIATIONS, THEY JOIN BEGIN IN VOCIFEROUSLY REJECTING
OVERT AMERICAN PRESSURE FOR COMPROMISE. BUT MORE IMPORTANT,
NO U S PLAN, NO MATTER HOW FAIR IN FORMULATION AND DEFT

IN PRESENTATION WOULD CAUSE AN ISRAELI GOVERNMENT TO
LOSE THE NATIONS CONFIDENCE, UNLESS, AND THIS SHOULD BE
WRIT LARGE, ANWAR SADAT IS SEEN BY ISRAELIS TO
AGAIN BE FLEXIBLY FOLLOWING THE PATH OF PEACE. IN THAT
EVENT IT IS POSSIBLE, BUT ONLY JUST POSSIBLE, THAT PUBLIC
OPINION WOULD LEAVE PART OF ITS PERVASIVE PARANOIA BEHIND
AND TAKE RISKS, IF SMALL RISKS, FOR PEACE. BUT THERE IS NO
SIGN WE ARE NEAR THAT ISRAELI WILLINGNESS AT THE MOMENT,
AND WE DONT EXPECT THE GOI'S RESPONSE THIS WEEK TO OUR
TWO QUESTIONS TO ALTER THE SITUATION HERE VERY MUCH. LEWIS

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